

A Change in the Priesthood – A Change in the Law

Description

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This publication is an edited extract from the second volume of a periodical we publish called *The Silver Trumpet*. In that volume, the contents of this booklet constitute introductory material for a related subject – ritual purity in type and antitype. Since this introductory material is, in many ways, a subject of its own, and since it is a topic concerning which we often receive questions, we have decided to publish it as a separate tract. If, upon reading this booklet, you desire more information of the same character, please do request the fuller publication as found in *The Silver Trumpet*.

We hope and ask that you investigate the contents of this little written messenger with a mind free from prejudice and uncontrolled by previously established opinions and habits. We trust that if your examination is marked by an anxious desire to learn, to improve your knowledge, and to reform your life into harmony with any new light gained, that you will be greatly enriched and illuminated by reading these pages.

by [Trent Wilde](#)

7:12 For there being a change in the priesthood, there is made of necessity a change also in the law. – Hebrews 7:12

These words, penned nearly two thousand years ago, are among the most neglected and least understood in all the New Testament. It is one of the great ironies of history that the collection of literature which has had the most significant and permeating influence upon the modern world (a.k.a. The Bible) also contains some of the most under-appreciated and trivialized statements in any language. Even Christians, most of whom would say that the above-quoted passage is the word of God, show by their neglect and ignorance of its meaning that they consider its message to be unessential at best. This is not to say that people are entirely uninterested in what this passage says, but the truth is that most people are just too lazy or consumed by other things to take the time to gain any real understanding.

Too often, people treat the Bible as a Magic 8-Ball or a fortune cookie, flipping to a random page and reading a line here and there, hoping to find an answer to a personal question or receive a sense of meaning for the day. If someone using the Bible in this way was to flip to the book of *Hebrews* and land on the verse quoted at the top of this page, he might think, “Okay ... there is something about a priesthood changing and something about that causing a change in a law ...” and, if he is really observant, he might realize that the change must be in the priestly law since that is the only law which would change “of necessity” due to a change in the priesthood; but most likely, he would probably just think, “I must have flipped wrong!” and move on. This way of reading the Bible obviously won’t get anyone too far. Even those who read whole books of the Bible through most often interpret them in the light of their own denominational theology, their perceived personal needs, or their own ideas and theories. This won’t get anyone very far either.

What about seeking to understand the meaning which the author of the statement was trying to convey within the context in which he was trying to convey it? Remember, all the books of the Bible, including *Hebrews*, were written by real persons to other real persons; they were written in real places, at real times, and in response to real circumstances. Since our study is not exclusively, or even primarily, focused on explaining *Hebrews*, we won’t here attempt to provide a historical construction of its setting, authorship, audience, etc. But we want to encourage you to approach *Hebrews*, and the other texts we will be considering, in a more careful and thoughtful way than people usually do. Ask questions like, “What did this author have in mind while writing this passage?” “What was he trying to get across to his readers?” “How would the first readers of this passage have understood it?” In order to gain some genuine understanding of our first passage, we need to examine *The Epistle to the Hebrews* with these sorts of questions in mind. Let’s go back to an earlier passage in this same letter:

2:17 Therefore, he [Jesus] had to be made like his brothers and sisters in every respect, so that he could become a merciful and faithful *high priest* in things relating to God, *to make atonement for the sins of the people*. – Hebrews 2:17

This is the first overt reference in *Hebrews* to the topic of “priest-hood.” There are a few things for us to learn here which will help us to understand the importance of this subject. First, let us observe three aspects of the

statement: (1) Jesus became like us in every respect, (2) he became our high priest, and (3) he makes atonement for our sins. Now, notice how the author of *Hebrews* links these things together: Jesus became just like us *so that* he could become our high priest, and he became our high priest “to make” (or “for the purpose of making”) atonement for our sins. In other words, the reason why Jesus became incarnate into humanity is so that he might become our high priest, and the reason why he became our high priest is so that he might atone for our sins. If one considers Jesus’ incarnation into humanity to be important, then the *reason* for his incarnation (becoming high priest) must be at least equally important. Moreover, both his incarnation and his high priesthood are said to be for the purpose of atoning for our sins, which means wiping away (removing) our sins.¹ Thus, for the author of *Hebrews*, and for anyone interested in, or impacted by the Bible (all of us), Jesus’ high priesthood is of the utmost importance.

There is, however, a problem. In order to grasp the problem, let us read a couple more passages.

3:1 Therefore, holy brothers and sisters, partners in a heavenly calling, take note of *Jesus*, the apostle and *high priest* whom we confess, – Hebrews 3:1

4:14 Therefore since *we have a great high priest* who has passed through the heavens, *Jesus the Son of God*, let us hold fast to our confession. – Hebrews 4:14

These verses, among others in *Hebrews*, teach openly that Jesus is a high priest. This idea is known well among some Christian denomi-nations; in fact, to some it has even become common to the point of seeming unspectacular and mundane. Jesus’ high priesthood is spoken of in such casual terms and with no sense of its import and no understanding of its meaning that it has become nothing more than a Christian cliché. To most, “Christ – our great High Priest” is just a phrase to say, but the shocking nature of such words is nearly always lost on the speaker.

In order to understand how radical the claim that Jesus is a high priest truly is, we must consider *Hebrews* in its own context. While the epistle is written anonymously, we know that it was written by a Jew in the first century A.D. who believed that Jesus was the Messiah.² The letter was written to like-minded believers who had become sluggish, and it is intent on rousing them to action. We must remember that at the time this letter was written there were relatively few believers in Jesus, and their teachings were new and considered odd by the majority – both Jews and Gentiles. If any ordinary Jew had come across this *Epistle to the Hebrews* in the first century, what would be his first impressions? In order to understand this, we must consider some of the things he would undoubtedly have floating around in his head. Surely, among these items would be the stories of Moses contained in the first five books of the Bible. The Lord had declared to Moses:

28:1 And you, bring near to you *your brother Aaron and his sons with him from among the Israelites*, so that *they may minister as my priests*—Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar, Aaron’s sons. – Exodus 28:1

3:10 So you are to appoint *Aaron and his sons*, and *they will be responsible for their priesthood*, but *the unauthorized person who comes near must be put to death*. – Numbers 3:10

The first of these verses simply tells us who it is that were ordained by God to be the priests; namely, the sons of Aaron. The second goes a step further and tells us that the right of the priesthood is exclusively for them and that any others who attempt to engage in priestly activity must be put to death. Despite these clear declarations, there was a challenge to the unique priestly authority of the sons of Aaron in the Israelite camp (Num. 16). This was a serious enough offense that, in harmony with the command already given, the rebellious suffered the punishment of death (Num. 16:31-35). Then it was that

16:40 It was a memorial for the Israelites, that no outsider *who is not a descendant of Aaron* should approach to burn incense before the Lord, that he might not become like Korah and his company—just as the Lord had spoken by the authority of Moses. – Numbers 16:40

This unmistakably demonstrated that God meant what He said when He commanded that the right of the priesthood was exclusively for the sons of Aaron and that it was a serious enough issue that those who violate this command must die. Yet, even the judgment against Korah and his company was not enough to

emphasize the importance of the exclusive priestly rights to the sons of Aaron. Immediately following this incident, Yahweh instructed that the children of Israel were to bring twelve staffs, one for each tribe, with the names of the leaders of the tribes written on each staff – one name per staff. The staffs were presented before Yahweh and He indicated which tribe was to be blessed with the priesthood by causing the staff of that tribe to blossom and bud. It was Aaron's staff that budded, thus moving the question of who was endowed with the right of priesthood beyond any shadow of a doubt (Read Numbers 17:1-18:1). And still, even after this, the Lord saw the exclusivity of the priesthood to Aaron to be so important that He then spelled out the command even more clearly than before. In fact, the law is so strict on this point, that not even the other Levites could engage in priestly activity *on pain of death* (Num. 18:1-3) – this privilege was exclusively granted to the sons of Aaron.

With all this in view, how do you suppose any Jew would react to *The Epistle to the Hebrews* when reading statements like "Jesus ... our great high priest," knowing that he was not of the sons of Aaron? How could his reaction be anything else but to immediately view Christ as a usurper of Aaron's authority, a rebel like Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, and one who defiantly claimed authority, even above (and against) God? And, to all initial appearances, that would seem to be the case, would it not? It is worth taking a few moments to settle into the weight of this reality. This is how a Jew, whether ancient or modern, could, and likely would, view this scenario: On one hand you have the law, which rests on the authority of God. It repeatedly and emphatically declares in unmistakable language that the sons of Aaron, and *only* the sons of Aaron are given the right of priesthood, and that anyone else who tries to be a priest ought to be punished with death. Then comes along *Hebrews*, nonchalantly stating that Jesus, who was not a descend-ant of Aaron, is the new high priest! What more blatant a contra-diction could one possibly find?

How often do we today reject certain notions because they appear to conflict with what we understand to be true? For example, many read 1 John 1:8, which says, "If we say we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us" and then, upon hearing someone say, "All who are truly born again do not commit sin," they immediately reject the notion because it appears to contradict 1 John 1:8. Now, which is the greater contradiction – this example or the apparent contradiction between the law of Moses and *Hebrews*? In all honesty, 1 John 1:8 does not say that it is impossible to be without sin, does it? Yet, the law of Moses does say that none other but the sons of Aaron have been given the right of priesthood. Moreover, when one continues to read in 1 John he finds that the very next verse says, "But if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to *cleanse us from all unrighteousness*," which agrees with the statement that "All who are truly born again do not commit sin" (see 1 John 3:9). On the other hand, when one reads further in the law of Moses, he only finds an ever increasingly emphatic repetition of the stipulation of the exclusivity of the priesthood to the sons of Aaron. This is to say that the apparent contradiction between the law of Moses and *Hebrews* is strong indeed. In fact, I don't know of any stronger.

If the author of *Hebrews* is not an advocate of lawless heresies of the worst sort, he had better have a good explanation for his claims, for it appears that he directly contradicts the law of Yahweh given through Moses. If he successfully clears the apparent contradiction so as to show that it is not really a contradiction, then that should teach us the lesson that we should not immediately reject an idea because it seems to contradict something we believe to be truth. In fact, all who accept *Hebrews* in spite of this glaring apparent contradiction, for the sake of consistency, must be extremely cautious not to reject other claims because of apparent contradictions. Likewise, if one rejects new ideas because they seem to contradict his current ideas, he must, for the sake of consistency, also reject *Hebrews* for its apparent contradiction, which is likely more seemingly insurmountable than most other contradictions one might come across.

One may wonder, "Since the apparent contradiction between the law of Moses and *Hebrews* seems to be so blatant that there does not appear to be any way around it, why even consider that *Hebrews* could be teaching the truth – why even give it a hearing?" It is under-standable how one might think that it is so far-fetched a difference that the conflict simply cannot be reconciled, and that one would surely have to stretch and pull things from their original meaning in order to make the two sources harmonize. That said, we all know that something which appears to be a contradiction is not always a true contradiction. This in itself should cause us to be cautious. In truth, all of us hold to ideas which seem to others to contradict certain facts, and when someone rashly denies our idea because of the seeming contradiction, we recognize that they fail to judge things on their own merits and understand things for what they are, but instead they jump to conclusions in a

careless manner. If we employ logic and sound reasoning rather than being ruled by our emotions, we will certainly be more calm and reflective and willing to consider things from another perspective. Thus, the proverb says “the one who answers a matter before he listens – that is his folly and his shame” (Proverbs 18:13).

When one takes this more humble approach, it soon becomes apparent that the author of *Hebrews* does not declare warfare against the law or say that it has been abolished; rather he appeals to the law to demonstrate his teachings throughout his letter. It is apparent that he didn't view his position as contradicting the law. We should, then, be willing to give him a chance to explain himself just as much as we would desire a chance to explain ourselves when confronted by another who believes that our views contradict the plain truth. Let us, then, consider his explanation:

5:4 And no one assumes this honor [the honor of high priesthood]³ on his own initiative, but only when called to it by God, as in fact Aaron was. ^{5:5} So also Christ *did not glorify himself* in becoming high priest, but the one who glorified him was God, who said to him, “*You are my Son! Today I have begotten you,*” [Ps. 2:7] **5:6** as also in another place God says, “*You are a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek*” [Ps. 110:4] ^{5:7} During his earthly life Christ offered both requests and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to the one who was able to save him from death and he was heard because of his devotion. ^{5:8} Although he was a son, he learned obedience through the things he suffered. ^{5:9} And by being perfected in this way, he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him, ^{5:10} and he was designated by God as high priest *after the order of Melchizedek*. – Hebrews 5:4-10⁴

The entire record of Christ's life testifies to his humility and lowliness. Nowhere in the annals of his history do we find him setting himself up as the new high priest or displaying a boastful spirit in any regard. Is this the manner of a rebel? Certainly not! Was there ever a time when Christ sought to undermine the law given through Moses? No! To the contrary, he taught that we ought to obey all the laws given through Moses.⁵ While *Hebrews* states these things about the character of Christ, none need take the epistle's word for it. It can be verified by any and all of the records of Christ's life. This shows that the entire mode of Christ's character is altogether different from that of a usurper, for he was not self-seeking, but self-sacrificing and meek. This sets at rest what would be the initial perception of Christ in the eyes of any ordinary Jew upon hearing high priestly claims. While this might set at ease the animosity which would arise toward Christ as a result of *Hebrews'* claim, it is not enough to justify the claim itself – it cannot undo what the law says concerning the exclusive right of the sons of Aaron to the priesthood.

Therefore, the author of *Hebrews*, in clearing up the misconception of the character of Christ, also introduces Scripture which forms part of the basis for the lawfulness of the priesthood of Christ. The two passages he introduces are Psalm 2 and Psalm 110. Both of these passages, according to the author of *Hebrews*, describe God (the Father) glorifying His Son. Let us briefly examine them in order to better understand his point. First, Psalm 2:

2:4 The one enthroned in the skies laughs;

Yahweh will have them in derision.

2:5 Then he [Yahweh] will speak to them in his wrath

and terrify them in his rage, saying,

2:6 “I [Yahweh] myself have poured out my king

on Zion, my holy hill.

2:7 I [Yahweh] will announce the decree. Yahweh has said unto me [Yahweh]:

'You are my Son! This day I have begotten you! – Psalm 2:4-7

As we have seen in previous studies,⁶ this psalm presents two Yahwehs.⁷ The first is the one mentioned in verses 4-5 who starts speaking in verse 6. The second Yahweh is introduced in verse 7 by the first Yahweh. The second Yahweh is then quoted as saying to the first Yahweh, "You are my Son! This day I have begotten you!" This plainly reveals two Yahwehs, one a Father, and the other, His Son. The psalm presents the Son as honored and glorified by the Father. For example, the Father says to the Son in verse 8:

2:8 Ask me, and I will give you the nations as your inheritance,
the ends of the uttermost parts of the earth for your possession. –

Psalm 2:8

Here, the Son is given rulership and authority by the Father. Now, let us look at the 110th Psalm:⁸

110:1 Yahweh said to my lord:

"Sit down at my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool!"

110:2 Yahweh extends your scepter of strength out from Zion.

Rule in the midst of your enemies!

110:3 Your people will willingly follow you in the day of your power, in the glories of the holy ones.

You were begotten from the womb before the dew of the rosy dawn.⁹

110:4 Yahweh has sworn by an oath and will not revoke it:

"You are a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek."

110:5 Yahweh¹⁰ at your right hand strikes down kings in the day of his wrath. – Psalm 110:1-5

Here again, we have two Yahwehs. The first is mentioned by name in verse 1, where He speaks to "my lord" who is told to sit at His (Yahweh's) right hand. Then in verse 5 we read of the "Yahweh at your right hand" showing that the "my lord" at the right hand of Yahweh in verse 1 is actually Yahweh as well. Also, as was the case in Psalm 2, we here have a begotten Yahweh who is to rule over his enemies and who is honored by the other Yahweh. What is unique about this Psalm is that the begotten Yahweh is sworn into an everlasting priesthood "after the order of Melchizedek."

The author of *Hebrews* is quoting these passages in order to show that there is indeed another priesthood to be established, not after the order of Aaron, but after the order of Melchizedek. Any Jew who accepts the prophecies of David, must accept this reality. What this means, though, still needs to be threshed out; thus *Hebrews* continues:

7:1 Now this *Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the most high God*, met Abraham as he was returning from defeating the kings and blessed him. [Gen. 14:17-19] 7:2 To him also *Abraham apportioned a tithe of everything*. [Gen. 14:20] His name first means king of righteousness, then king of Salem, that is, king of peace. 7:3 Without father, without mother, without genealogy, he has neither beginning of days nor end of life but is like the son of God, and he remains a priest for all time. 7:4 But see how great he must be, if Abraham the patriarch gave him a tithe of his plunder. 7:5 And those of the sons of Levi who receive the priestly office have authorization according to the law to collect a tithe from the people, that is, from their fellow country-men, although they too are descendants of Abraham. 7:6 But Melchizedek who does not share their ancestry collected a tithe from Abraham and blessed the one who possessed the promise. 7:7 Now without dispute the

inferior is blessed by the superior, ^{7:8} and in one case tithes are received by mortal men, while in the other by him who is affirmed to be alive. ^{7:9} And it could be said that Levi himself, who receives tithes, paid a tithe through Abraham. ^{7:10} For he was still in his ancestor Abraham's loins when Melchizedek met him. – Hebrews 7:1-10

Here, the author of *Hebrews* provides an account of Melchizedek, who was said to be “priest of the Most High God,” even though he was not descended from Abraham, and therefore not of Levi (or Aaron either). The record given in *Genesis* portrays Melchizedek as even greater than Abraham, for he blessed him and Abraham paid tithes to him. Levi also, being of the line of Abraham, was considered to be subordinate to Melchizedek. In fact, the author of *Hebrews* takes it a step further and says that when people paid tithe to the Levites, they paid to mortal men, but when Abraham paid tithes to Melchizedek, he paid to “him who is affirmed to be alive.”¹¹

^{7:11} So if perfection had in fact been possible through the Levitical priesthood—for on that basis the people received the law—what further need would there have been for another priest to arise, said to be after the order of Melchizedek and not in Aaron's order? ^{7:12} For when the priesthood changes, a change in the law must necessarily come as well. ^{7:13} Yet the one these things are spoken about belongs to a different tribe, and no one from that tribe has ever officiated at the altar. ^{7:14} For it is clear that our Lord is descended from Judah, yet Moses said nothing about priests in connection with that tribe. ^{7:15} And this is even clearer if another priest arises in the likeness of Melchizedek, ^{7:16} who has become a priest not by a legal regulation about physical descent but by the power of an indestructible life. ^{7:17} For here is the testimony about him: “*You are a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.*” [Ps. 110:4] – Hebrews 7:11-17

Again, Psalm 110 is quoted in order to demonstrate that it had, in fact, been prophesied that there would arise another priest after a different order from that of Aaron. The Aaronic priests became such because of “a legal regulation about physical descent,” but this priest who would come “after the order of Melchizedek” would gain his priesthood “by the power of an indestructible life,” as indicated by the fact that he was to be “a priest forever” (Ps. 110:4). Notice as well that *Hebrews* says that “the one these things are spoken about belongs to a different tribe” (vs. 13). Yes, it is true that, retrospectively, one can see that Jesus came from Judah, as our author also points out in the following verse. But that isn't enough to convince a non-believer that the words of Psalm 110 were spoken about one of another tribe. And here, in verse 13, *Hebrews* isn't simply speaking retrospectively, but is rather commenting on Psalm 110 itself, which indicates that the author of *Hebrews* believed that the psalm in some way intimates that the one therein sworn into priesthood was from another tribe. Well, is this so? Actually, this is quite clear, for Psalm 110 tells us that this one will rule from Zion (vs. 2), which is the place from which the kings of Judah ruled. Likewise, he will rule with a scepter and gain victories over his enemies. This language is similar to Jacob's blessing of Judah found in Gen. 49:8-10. Additionally, Melchizedek was not only a priest, but also a king – the king of Salem (Jerusalem). This demonstrates that Psalm 110 itself pictures the one who is sworn into the Melchizedekian priesthood as being a kingly Judahite figure. The coming about of this other priesthood was also spoken of in another text known as *The Testament of Levi*, to wit:

8:14 ... *from Judah a king will arise and shall found a new priesthood* to all the Gentiles. – The Testament of Levi 8:14

18:1 ... the priesthood will lapse

18:2 And then *the Lord will raise up a new priest*

18:8 ... And *there shall be no successor for him from generation to generation forever.*

18:9 And in his priesthood the nations shall be multiplied in knowledge on the earth.

and they shall be illumined by the grace of the Lord,

but Israel shall be diminished by her ignorance
and darkened by her grief.

In his priesthood sin shall cease

and lawless men shall rest from their evil deeds,

and righteous men shall find rest in him.

18:10 And he shall open the gates of paradise;

he shall remove the sword that has threatened since Adam,

18:11 and he will grant to the saints to eat of the tree of life. – The Testament of Levi 18:1-2, 8-11

Clearly, the priesthood described here is not the Aaronic priesthood; rather, the things said concerning it are the same things said concerning the priesthood after the order of Melchizedek in Psalm 110 and *Hebrews*. This text also brings to light one of the key differences pointed out by *Hebrews* between the Aaronic order and the Melchizedekian order. That is, the priesthood after the order of Melchizedek, being a priesthood of righteousness (as indicated by the name), can indeed bring perfection; but such cannot be produced by the Levitical order. The reasoning of the author here is this: since the purpose of priesthood is to accomplish atonement (wiping away) of sins, there would be no need for a new priesthood if the Aaronic priesthood was already accomplishing that purpose without difficulty. But since Yahweh declared that there will be a new priesthood, it reveals that the Levitical priesthood could not accomplish the needed atonement. In other words, Yahweh wouldn't bring in a new priesthood for no reason. Also, since this new priesthood is said to be an everlasting priesthood, and since it is named after Melchizedek (meaning "King of Righteousness") it is evident that this priesthood will accomplish the work of atonement.

In the remainder of *Hebrews* 7, the writer expounds more on the differences between the two priesthoods and the superiority of the Melchizedekian order. Having demonstrated from prophecy that there is to be a change in the priesthood, he has accomplished one purpose; but there is still more to show. Any first century Jew reading this letter would, by this time, have seen a fair amount of evidence that a new priesthood is prophesied. But what of the law of Moses? It still seems to restrict the right of priesthood to Aaron. Yes, David prophesied a new priesthood, and both *The Testament of Levi* and *Hebrews* are in harmony with that thought; but *Exodus* and *Numbers* still state that no one other than the sons of Aaron are to be priests. The next part of *Hebrews* offers an explanation:

8:1 Now the main point of what we are saying is this: We have such a high priest, one who *sat down at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven*, [Ps. 110:1] 8:2 a minister in the sanctuary and the true tabernacle that the Lord, not man, set up. 8:3 For every high priest is appointed to offer both gifts and sacrifices. So this one too had to have something to offer. 8:4 Now if he were on earth, he would not be a priest, since there are already priests who offer the gifts prescribed by the law. 8:5 The place where they serve is a sketch and shadow of the heavenly sanctuary, just as Moses was warned by God as he was about to complete the tabernacle. For he says, "*See that you make everything according to the design¹² shown to you on the mountain.*" [Ex. 25:40] 8:6 But now Jesus has obtained a superior ministry, since the covenant that he mediates is also better and is enacted on better promises. – Hebrews 8:1-6

There are a number of aspects in the above paragraph which we must not miss. First, the author of *Hebrews* tells us that what he says here is the main point of his discussion. And what is the substance of what he says? It is that Jesus is the high priest, not of the earthly sanctuary, but of the sanctuary in the heavens.¹³ The first evidence given for this is an allusion to Psalm 110:1 where, as we have already seen, one Yahweh tells the other Yahweh (who, in verse 4, is sworn into priesthood after the order of Melchizedek) to take His seat at His right hand. Since Yahweh dwells in His temple in heaven, it is evident that that is where this event takes place. Thus, it becomes plain that the priesthood after the order of Melchizedek, according to Psalm 110

is a heavenly priesthood.

The author of *Hebrews* then points out that if Christ were on earth He would not be a priest. Why is this? Well, as he says, there are already priests who offer the sacrifices prescribed by the law. And who were those priests? The sons of Aaron. And since Jesus was not of the sons of Aaron, he could not be among them and offer sacrifices in the earthly tabernacle. You see, the laws which restricted the priesthood to the sons of Aaron were only ever given in relation to the earthly tabernacle. This is apparent in all the passages which give such commands. Take Numbers 18:3 for example, which says that if a Levite who is not descended from Aaron approaches the altar, he must die. What altar is it speaking of? None other than the altar of the earthly tabernacle, correct? What all this means is that the law does not in any way restrict someone who is not among the sons of Aaron from being a priest in another sanctuary. In fact, in order for someone to honestly use the passages in the Pentateuch which restrict the priesthood to the sons of Aaron to attempt to disqualify Christ from being the high priest in the heavenly sanctuary, they would have to demonstrate that those passages dictate that only sons of Aaron can be priests in the heavenly sanctuary. And of course, those passages say no such thing; they only speak of the earthly sanctuary. In fact, the Pentateuch never portrays any human beings dwelling or ministering in the skies. The law only ever restricted the priesthood to the sons of Aaron for *their* particular priesthood. This is brought out in the following verse:

3:10 So you are to appoint Aaron and his sons, and they will be responsible for *their* priesthood; but the unauthorized person who comes near must be put to death.” – Numbers 3:10

Here, the law clearly restricts the priesthood to the sons of Aaron for *their* *priesthood*, but there is nothing in the law which even so much as implies that there can never be another priesthood. Therefore, what seemed to be such an impassable contradiction, turns out to be no contradiction at all. Remember the lessons.

Next, the author of *Hebrews* shows that even when the tabernacle was first being erected, Moses was plainly told that it was to be built according to the pattern shown him in the mount. In other words, the earthly tabernacle was made according to the pattern of the heavenly tabernacle and was thus but a sketch, or a shadow, of that heavenly tabernacle. So it is that from the beginning, the earthly priestly system was only to point us to the heavenly priestly system. The earthly sanctuary and priesthood were “a symbol for the time then present” (Heb. 9:9), governed by “external regulations imposed *until* the new order came” (Heb. 9:10). Expanding on this, the author of *Hebrews* says:

10:1 For the law [the *typical* priestly law] possesses a shadow of the good things to come *but not the reality itself*, and is therefore completely unable, by the same sacrifices offered continually, year after year, to perfect those who come to worship. 10:2 For otherwise would they not have ceased to be offered, since the worshipers would have been purified once for all and so have no further consciousness of sin? 10:3 But in those sacrifices there is a reminder of sins year after year. 10:4 For the blood of bulls and goats cannot take away sins. 10:5 So when he came into the world, he said,

“*Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me.*”

10:6 “*Whole burnt offerings and sin-offerings you took no delight in.*”

10:7 “*Then I said, ‘Behold: I have come—it is written of me in the scroll of the book—to do your will, O God!’*” [Ps. 40:6-8]

10:8 When he says above, “*Sacrifices and offerings and whole burnt offerings and sin-offerings you did not desire nor did you take delight in them*” [Ps. 40:6] (which are offered according to the law), 10:9 then he says, “*Behold: I have come to do your will.*” [Ps. 40:8] *He does away with¹⁴ the first to establish the second.* – Hebrews 10:1-9

Since the earthly services could not actually accomplish the work of atonement, and since God does not delight in the blood of bulls and goats, when the antitypical system would be put in place, the typical system would pass away, and indeed it did (Heb. 8:13). Again, when comparing the Aaronic priesthood with the priesthood after the order of Melchizedek, the author of *Hebrews* says,

7:17 For here is the testimony about him: “*You are a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek*” [Ps. 110:4]
7:18 On the one hand *a setting aside of a former command comes to pass* because it is weak and useless,
7:19 for the law [the *typical* priestly law] made nothing perfect. On the other hand a better hope is introduced, through which we draw near to God. 7:20 And since this was not done without a sworn affirmation—for the others have become priests without a sworn affirmation, 7:21 but Jesus did so with a sworn affirmation by the one who said to him, “*The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind, ‘You are a priest forever’*” [Ps. 110:4] —7:22 accordingly Jesus has become the guarantee of a better covenant. – Hebrews 7:17-22

8:6 But now Jesus has obtained a superior ministry, since the covenant that he mediates is also better and is enacted on better promises.

8:7 For if that first covenant had been faultless, no one would have looked for a second one. 8:8 But *showing its fault*, God says to them,

“Look, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will complete *a new covenant* with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah.

8:9 “*It will not be like the covenant that I made with their fathers, on the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt*, because they did not continue in my covenant and I had no regard for them, says the Lord.

8:10 “For this is the covenant that I will establish with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord. I will put my laws in their minds and I will inscribe them on their hearts. And I will be their God and they will be my people.

8:11 “And there will be no need at all for each one to teach his countryman or each one to teach his brother saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ since they will all know me, from the least to the greatest.

8:12 “For I will be merciful toward their evil deeds, and their sins I will remember no longer.” [Jer. 31:31-34]

8:13 When he says, “new,” *he makes the first obsolete*. Now what is growing obsolete and aging is about to disappear. – Hebrews 8:6-8:13

Hebrews here is speaking of the covenant specifically as it relates to the priesthood, as is made plain by the following verse (Heb. 9:1). In all the above passages, the author of *Hebrews* has demonstrated that, according to these various prophecies, when the new priesthood arises, the old will pass away. And indeed, what need (or even use) would there be for it when the thing to which it pointed has already arrived and the new priesthood, which is able to accomplish its task, is on the scene and in operation? And this, especially since the typical priesthood was unable to accomplish these things. In agreement with *Hebrews*, *The Testament of Levi* also declared:

5:2 And he said to me, “Levi, to you I have given the blessings of the priesthood *until* I shall come and dwell in the midst of Israel. – The Testament of Levi 5:2

4:4 Blessings shall be given to you and to all your posterity *until* through His Son’s compassion the Lord shall visit all the nations forever. – The Testament of Levi 4:4

18:1 ... *the priesthood will lapse*,¹⁵ 18:2 and then the Lord will raise up a new priest. – The Testament of Levi 18:1-2

Truly, when a new priesthood is established, the old priesthood functions no more. In addition to the testimonies already cited, we also have the example of a previous change of priesthood. This is well captured in the book of *Numbers*:

3:11 Then the Lord spoke to Moses: 3:12 “Look, *I myself have taken the Levites from among the Israelites instead of every firstborn who opens the womb among the Israelites*. So the Levites belong to me, – Numbers 3:11-12¹⁶

8:14 And so you are to separate the Levites from among the Israelites, and the Levites will be mine.

8:15 “*After this, the Levites will go in to do the work of the tent of meeting*. So you must cleanse them and offer them like a wave offering. 8:16 For they are entirely given to me from among the Israelites. *I have taken them for myself instead of all who open the womb, the firstborn sons of all the Israelites*. 8:17 For all the firstborn males among the Israelites are mine, both humans and animals; when I destroyed all the firstborn in the land of Egypt I set them apart for myself. 8:18 So *I have taken the Levites instead of all the firstborn sons among the Israelites*. – Numbers 8:14-18

Prior to this, the Lord had declared that the firstborn of all Israel were to be given to him for the work of the sanctuary (Ex. 13:2; 34:19-20). This change to the Levitical priesthood is as verily a change in priesthood as is the change from the Levitical priesthood to the priest-hood after the order of Melchizedek. And concerning both of these changes it can just as rightly be said, “For there being a change in the priesthood, there is made of necessity a change also in the law” (Heb. 7:12).

It is important to understand the significance of this change. We need to grasp just what it meant, as well as what it did not mean. As all know, the change to the Levitical priesthood did not mean the end of the law, the end of priestly activity, the end of sacrifice, or anything of the sort; but it did indeed mean the end of the previous priesthood and a change in the priestly law. No longer could the firstborn of any tribe approach the altar; no longer could they have anything to do with priesthood or the work of the sanctuary, unless they were of the tribe of Levi. What they formerly could do, they no longer were permitted to do, and this, on pain of death (Num. 1:47-51).

This is not the only change that occurred either. In the former priesthood, there was no sanctuary at all, only altars. The immensity of the change from having no sanctuary to having one cannot be overestimated. With a sanctuary, also came centralization of worship. Formerly, the priests could set up altars in any location,¹⁷ but after the change of priesthood, sacrificing on any altar, aside from the one in the tabernacle, was forbidden. This is vividly expressed in the story of the altar of the Reubenites, Gadites, and the half-tribe of Manasseh.

22:10 The Reubenites, Gadites, and half-tribe of Manasseh came to Geliloth near the Jordan in the land of Canaan *and built there*, near the Jordan, *an impressive altar*. 22:11 The Israelites received this report: “Look, the Reubenites, Gadites, and half-tribe of Manasseh have *built an altar* at the entrance to the land of Canaan, at Geliloth near the Jordan on the Israelite side.” 22:12 *When the Israelites heard this, the entire Israelite community assembled at Shiloh to launch an attack against them*.

22:13 The Israelites sent Phinehas, son of Eleazar, the priest, to the land of Gilead to the Reubenites, Gadites, and the half-tribe of Manasseh. 22:14 He was accompanied by ten leaders, one from each of the Israelite tribes, each one a family leader among the Israelite clans. 22:15 They went to the land of Gilead to the Reubenites, Gadites, and the half-tribe of Manasseh, and said to them: 22:16 “The entire community of the Lord says, ‘*Why have you disobeyed the God of Israel by turning back today from following the Lord? You built an altar for yourselves and have rebelled today against the Lord*.’” 22:17 The sin we committed at Peor was bad enough. To this very day we have not purified ourselves; it even brought a plague on the community of the Lord. 22:18 Now today *you dare to turn back from following the Lord! You are rebelling today against the Lord*; tomorrow he may break out in anger against the entire community of Israel. 22:19 But if your own land is

impure, cross over to the Lord's own land, where the Lord himself lives, and settle down among us. But *don't rebel against the Lord or us by building for yourselves an altar aside from the altar of the Lord our God.*¹⁸ 22:20 When Achan son of Zerah disobeyed the command about the city's riches, the entire Israelite community was judged, though only one man had sinned. He most certainly died for his sin! "

22:21 The Reubenites, Gadites, and the half-tribe of Manasseh answered the leaders of the Israelite clans: 22:22 "El, God, the Lord! El, God, the Lord! He knows the truth! Israel must also know! If we have rebelled or disobeyed the Lord, don't spare us today! 22:23 *If we have built an altar for ourselves to turn back from following the Lord by making burnt sacrifices and grain offerings on it, or by offering tokens of peace on it, the Lord himself will punish us.* 22:24 We swear we have done this because we were worried that in the future your descendants would say to our descendants, 'What relationship do you have with the Lord God of Israel? 22:25 The Lord made the Jordan a boundary between us and you Reubenites and Gadites. You have no right to worship the Lord.' In this way your descendants might cause our descendants to stop obeying the Lord. 22:26 So we decided to build this altar, *not for burnt offerings and sacrifices,* 22:27 but as a reminder to us and you, and to our descendants who follow us, that we will honor the Lord *in his very presence* with burnt offerings, sacrifices, and tokens of peace. Then in the future your descendants will not be able to say to our descendants, 'You have no right to worship the Lord.' 22:28 We said, 'If in the future they say such a thing to us or to our descendants, we will reply, "See the *model* of the Lord's altar that our ancestors made, *not for burnt offerings or sacrifices, but as a reminder to us and you.*" ' 22:29 Far be it from us *to rebel against the Lord by turning back today from following after the Lord by building an altar for burnt offerings, sacrifices, and tokens of peace aside from the altar of the Lord our God located in front of his dwelling place!*

22:30 When Phinehas the priest and the community leaders and clan leaders who accompanied him heard the defense of the Reubenites, Gadites, and the Manassehites, they were satisfied. 22:31 Phinehas, son of Eleazar, the priest, said to the Reubenites, Gadites, and the Manassehites, "Today we know that the Lord is among us, because you have not disobeyed the Lord in this. Now you have rescued the Israelites from the Lord's judgment."

22:32 Phinehas, son of Eleazar, the priest, and the leaders left the Reubenites and Gadites in the land of Gilead and reported back to the Israelites in the land of Canaan. 22:33 The Israelites were satisfied with their report and gave thanks to God. They said nothing more about launching an attack to destroy the land in which the Reubenites and Gadites lived. 22:34 The Reubenites and Gadites named the altar, "Surely it is a Reminder to us that the Lord is God." – Joshua 22:10-34

Plainly, what was permissible and usual in the former priesthood, was now forbidden in the new (Levitical) priesthood. We must recognize that while a change such as this did not do away with any aspect of the law, there was indeed a real and dramatic change in the manner in which the law was to be observed. Things which formerly could be done, could be done no longer, and things which could not be done, now could (and must) be performed. The former priesthood could no longer continue on, now that the new priesthood was in place. This is the way it was with the change of the priesthood *to* the Levitical system, and so this is how it must also be with the change *from* the Levitical system *to* the priesthood after the order of Melchizedek.¹⁹

We can now see that with the establishment of the priesthood after the order of Melchizedek, we are under a different system from that of the Levitical priesthood. Instead of priesthood being determined by lineage, it is by the power of indestructible life. Instead of the sacrifices of the blood of bulls and goats, we have the sacrifices²⁰ of the blood of the Messiah (Heb. 8:3; 9:23) and the sacrifices of praise, good works, and fellowship of his followers (Heb. 13:15-16). Instead of the earthly sanctuary, we have the heavenly sanctuary. Priesthood is not abolished, law is not destroyed, sacrifice is not done away with, and the sanctuary is not rendered useless. No! It is only that the typical system came to an end and the antitypical system – with its priesthood, its laws, its sacrifices, and its sanctuary – was established.

The transferal of the priestly system from type to antitype is the dominant theme of *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, and more than that, it was the unique message of the apostles and the early followers of the Messiah. It was a new paradigm within which all of their experience found its place. Much of *The Revelation*, for instance, pictures scenes in the heavenly temple (Rev. 11:19); and that which is not directly seen as in the heavenly temple is viewed either as being affected by what there takes place or as being observed through the lens of

the judgment in the temple courtroom.²¹

Thus, this idea of the changed priesthood was not merely a matter of having a priestly Christology or a replacement theology in the absence of the Jerusalem temple;²² it had far reaching practical implications which had an immense impact on the way the early believers lived their lives on earth. Their knowledge of the transfer of the priesthood and the sanctuary system gave them new duties and it provided them with new ways of carrying out old duties. Heaven and earth were intimately connected and they, while on earth, were to do priestly activity in connection with the temple in heaven. Being called into priesthood after the order of Melchizedek, they were just as affected by this new priestly system as were the children of Israel and the Aaronic priests by the Levitical system. In order to see how widespread this idea of the new priesthood was, and how great of an impact it had on the lives of the Nazarenes,²³ we must look at the other literature which they produced. Let us start with Paul's letter to the Romans:

15:15 ... I have written more boldly to you on some points so as to remind you, because of the grace given to me by God ^{15:16} to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles. *I serve the gospel of God as a priest, so that the Gentiles may become an acceptable offering*, sanctified by the Holy Spirit. – Romans 15:15-16

Here, Paul pictures himself as a priest. One might ask, "after what order?" Certainly, it could not have been after the Aaronic order, for he was not a son of Aaron, but rather, he was from the tribe of Benjamin (Phil. 3:5). Moreover, he was not just a priest in the general sense that all Israelites were called to be priests (Ex. 19:6), for he speaks of himself as offering sacrifices, which was beyond the scope of the general priestly role of the kingdom of Israel. Paul was not appointed to priesthood because of lineage; instead, he was appointed through the grace of God by the power of everlasting life. Thus, he was a priest after Christ's likeness and in connection with Christ. Since Christ is High Priest after the order of Melchizedek, then that is the only priesthood in which Paul could have participated by co-operating with Christ in priestly activity. Remember, if Paul was under the Levitical order, he would be asking the death sentence upon himself by claiming to be a priest. But Paul was not under the Levitical priesthood; he was in the antitypical priesthood – the priesthood after the order of Melchizedek. Instead of offering priestly rites of grain, drink, or animals, he offered the Gentiles as living sacrifices. Thus, he said,

12:1 Therefore I exhort you, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to *present your bodies as a sacrifice*—alive, holy, and pleasing to God—which is your reasonable service. – Romans 12:1

In the Levitical priesthood, this language would be nonsensical and could even imply human sacrifice – a thing forbidden by the law.²⁴ In the antitypical system, however, the sacrifice is not a death to the body, but a death to the carnal mind (Rom. 6-8), and thus we, as humans, are to be sacrifices. Paul was not the only one among the Nazarenes to refer to these clearly non-Levitical sacrifices; Peter like-wise exhorted:

2:5 you yourselves, as living stones, are built up as a spiritual house *to be a holy priesthood and to offer spiritual sacrifices* that are acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. – 1 Peter 2:5

Likewise, the author of *Hebrews* says,

13:15 Through him then *let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise* to God, that is, *the fruit of our lips*, acknowledging his name. ^{13:16} And do not neglect *to do good and to share what you have*, for God is pleased with *such sacrifices*. – Hebrews 13:15-16

All this language is that of sacrifice and priesthood, and yet no one can deny that it is being used in a way which is clearly different from the Aaronic order. Yes, these sacrifices are those foreshadowed by the Levitical types, but they are not the same sacrifices. Let us look at a few more examples:

4:6 For I am already being *poured out as an offering*, and the time for me to depart is at hand. – 2 Timothy 4:6

2:17 But even if *I am being poured out like a drink offering on the sacrifice and service of your faith*, I am glad and rejoice together with all of you. – Philippians 2:17

Paul's experience, as described in the above verses, was, in the antitypical service, what the drink offerings were in the typical service. Again,

4:10 I have great joy in the Lord because now at last you have again expressed your concern for me. (Now I know you were concerned before but had no opportunity to do anything.) 4:11 I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content in any circumstance. 4:12 I have experienced times of need and times of abundance. In any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of contentment, whether I go satisfied or hungry, have plenty or nothing. 4:13 I am able to do all things through the one who strengthens me. 4:14 Nevertheless, you did well to *share with me* in my trouble.

4:15 And as you Philippians know, at the beginning of my gospel ministry, when I left Macedonia, no church *shared with me in this matter of giving and receiving* except you alone. 4:16 For even in Thessalonica on more than one occasion *you sent something for my need*. 4:17 I do not say this because I am seeking a gift. Rather, I seek the credit that abounds to your account. 4:18 For I have received everything, and I have plenty. I have all I need because I received from Epaphroditus *what you sent—a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, very pleasing to God*. – Philippians 4:10-18

The material gift (whether financial, or some other means of sustenance) sent to Paul by the Philippians was a fragrant offering and an acceptable sacrifice. Does this say there is no sacrifice? To the contrary, it says there is. Is this an acceptable sacrifice in the Levitical order? No. Yet, it is an acceptable sacrifice in the system in which Paul operated. Paul speaks of this same idea elsewhere,

9:13 Don't you know that those who serve in the temple eat food from the temple, and those who serve at the altar receive a part of the offerings? 9:14 *In the same way the Lord commanded those who proclaim the gospel to receive their living by the gospel*. – 1 Corinthians 9:13-14

The idea here is that just as the priests of the typical service obtained their sustenance through the work of the temple, just so the priests of the antitypical service, working in connection with the anti-typical temple are to obtain their sustenance by their work. Part of this sustenance is described in the following passage:

10:14 So then, my dear friends, flee from idolatry. 10:15 I am speaking to thoughtful people. Consider what I say. 10:16 Is not the cup of blessing that we bless a sharing in the blood of Christ? Is not the bread that we break a sharing in the body of Christ? 10:17 Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all share the one bread. 10:18 Look at the people of Israel. Are not those who eat the sacrifices partners in the altar? 10:19 Am I saying that idols or food sacrificed to them amount to anything? 10:20 No, I mean that what the pagans sacrifice is to demons and not to God. I do not want you to be partners with demons. 10:21 You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons. You cannot take part in the table of the Lord and the table of demons. – 1 Corinthians 10:14-21

There are three primary aspects which Paul here brings into focus: (1) pagan sacrifice, (2) suppers of the Lord, [25](#) and (3) Israelite sacrifices under the typical priesthood. Why are these three elements all brought out in connection with each other? What is their connection? These questions are of the utmost importance. Let us observe a few points. First, we are told that when we partake of the Lord's supper we share in the body and blood of Christ and are thus partners in him. Likewise, those who ate the sacrifices in ancient Israel were partners in the altar, and those who eat food sacrificed to idols are partners with demons.[26](#) Thus, these three primary aspects are all being spoken of as the same sort of thing. Next, observe that Paul, especially in verse 21, contrasts the suppers of the Lord with pagan sacrifices. And what is the contrast? Is it that one is a sacrificial (priestly) act and the other is not? No! It is that one act joins one to demons while the other joins one to Christ. Notice the way in which Paul explains how partaking of the Lord's supper joins one to Christ. He does so by comparing it to the sacrifices of ancient Israel (vs. 18). Here, he does not contrast; he compares, as though one were a parallel of the other. He tells us that the Lord's supper joins us to Christ and then, as if to prove his point he says, "Look at the sacrifices of Israel – it was the same for them." Thus, he

communicates that an ancient Israelite sacrifice and a supper of the Lord are, in principle, the same thing, though obviously in different systems. Considering another aspect Paul brings out a little later in the same letter will make the matter all the more clear:

11:23 For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night in which he was betrayed took bread, ^{11:24} and after he had given thanks he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." ^{11:25} In the same way, he also took the cup after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, every time you drink it, in remembrance of me." ^{11:26} For every time you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. – 1 Corinthians 11:23-26

Did not Christ offer his body and blood as a sacrifice for us? Does he not offer his blood for us in the heavenly sanctuary (Heb. 9:23; Ps. 68:20)? Thus, since the bread *is* (metaphorically) his body and since the wine *is* (metaphorically) his blood which was sacrificed for us, when we partake of suppers of the Lord, we are truly engaging in a sacrificial (priestly) act. This is clearly something which is not a part of the laws for the Aaronic priesthood, for we find nothing of this sort there. "But," we must ask, "is that also true, concerning the Melchizedekian priesthood?"

14:18 Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine. (Now he was the priest of the Most High God.) – Genesis 14:18

According to *Genesis*, Melchizedek, just as Christ would later do, brought out bread and wine. This, in and of itself, establishes a connection. What is especially significant here, though, is the parenthetical note in the verse. The author of this passage has inserted this note here as if to connect the bread and the wine with Melchizedek's priesthood. To paraphrase his meaning, it is as if he is saying, "Melchizedek brought out bread and wine (he was, after all, a priest.)"

With this in mind, along with the other "Melchizedek traditions" preserved in other pre-Jesus literature, we can understand that when Christ instituted the suppers of the Lord, he was instituting a new manner of observing priestly activities. New – yes, in one sense, yet ancient at the same time. Christ was indeed becoming a high priest "after the order of Melchizedek." And by his injunction for us to follow his example in eating these suppers, he was, in effect, inviting us to join into priesthood under him. Evidently, this is just what his early followers did:

2:42 They were devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to *the breaking of bread* and to *prayer*. ^{2:43} Reverential awe came over everyone, and many wonders and miraculous signs came about by the apostles. ^{2:44} All who believed were together and held everything in common, ^{2:45} and they began selling their property and possessions and distributing the proceeds to everyone, as anyone had need. ^{2:46} *Every day* they continued to gather together by common consent in the temple courts, *breaking bread from house to house, sharing their food* with glad and humble hearts, ^{2:47} *praising God* and having the good will of all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number every day those who were being saved. – Acts 2:42-47

These early believers were daily involved in all the activities here described, which, as we have just seen, are antitypical sacrificial acts. [27](#)?[28](#) Earlier in Acts 2, we have another record of the Nazarenes keeping the priestly law in antitype.

2:1 Now when the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. ^{2:2} Suddenly a sound like a violent wind blowing came from heaven and filled the entire house where they were sitting. ^{2:3} And parted tongues as of fire appeared to them and came to rest on each one of them. ^{2:4} All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit, and they began to speak in other languages as the Spirit enabled them. – Acts 2:1-4

The ancient scriptures of Israel had declared that the annual feasts, including Pentecost, were given for the purpose of sacrifice (Lev. 23:37), which is undoubtedly a priestly act. Thus the observance of Pentecost itself, as described above, was a participation in the priestly services. However, we do not find here any mention of presenting typical offerings or animal sacrifices, or anything else which was part of the typical priestly law. Instead, at the third hour (Acts 2:15), the time of sacrifice,²⁹ the Spirit came upon them. Fire from heaven

signaled the acceptance of certain sacrifices in ancient times,³⁰ and now the acceptance of the believers on the day of Pentecost was indicated by the same symbol.

The fact that the Nazarenes kept the feasts is a well attested part of history. The book of *Acts* records:

18:20 When they asked him to stay longer, he [Paul] would not consent, 18:21 but he said farewell to them, saying “*I must by all means keep this feast that is coming in Jerusalem, but I will come back to you again if God wills.*” Then he set sail from Ephesus. – Acts 18:20-21

Later,

20:16 For Paul had decided to sail past Ephesus so as not to spend time in the province of Asia, for he was hurrying to arrive in Jerusalem, if possible, *for the day of Pentecost.* – Acts 20:16

These passages indicate simply that Paul kept these feasts, but they don’t tell us much concerning his manner of observing them. For that, we must look elsewhere:

20:6 We sailed away from Philippi after the days of Unleavened Bread, and within five days we came to the others in Troas, where we stayed for seven days. – Acts 20:6

The implication in this passage is that Paul kept the Feast of Unleavened Bread in Philippi. What is significant about this is the fact that under the Levitical law, all males were required to keep this feast at the temple in Jerusalem.³¹ If Paul were under the system of the earthly temple (the Levitical system) he would be breaking the law on this point. But, since he was under the priesthood of Melchizedek, his priestly activity was to be done in connection with the heavenly temple and therefore was not centered around the temple in Jerusalem. In further demonstration of Paul’s separation from the typical sanctuary and its priesthood in his keeping of the priestly law, we’ll look at another instance recorded in *Acts*:

18:18 Paul, after staying many more days in Corinth, said farewell to the brothers and sailed away to Syria accompanied by Priscilla and Aquila. He had his hair cut off at Cenchrea because he had made a vow. – Acts 18:18

Within the Jewish economy, one was to shave their head at the end of a Nazarite vow (Num. 6:1-21). The stipulations for ending this vow under the typical priestly law included animal sacrifices, which, of course, had to be offered in the temple in Jerusalem. Strikingly, Paul does not here offer animal sacrifices nor does he end the vow in Jerusalem where he ought to. Rather, he ends the vow hundreds of miles away from Jerusalem, in Greece; after which, he sails to Ephesus (Acts 18:19). Again, if Paul were under the Levitical system, he would be in overt disobedience of the law. Yet, Paul does not do away with the law or with the Nazarite vow. He observes the vow, but in a different manner – a manner separate from the Levitical system. The importance of this cannot be overemphasized. Let us not fall into one ditch or the other, thinking Paul either did away with the law, or that he simply observed it after the manner of the Levitical law. No! Neither he nor Jesus abolished the priestly law, but they both did observe it in a manner which differed greatly from other Jews of their time and from the Levitical system.³²

Lastly, in his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul said,

5:7 Clean out the old yeast so that you may be a new batch of dough—you are, in fact, without yeast. For *Christ, our Passover lamb*, has been sacrificed. 5:8 So then, *let us celebrate the festival*, not with the old yeast, the yeast of vice and evil, but with the bread without yeast, the bread of sincerity and truth. – 1 Corinthians 5:7-8

The promotion of Passover observance in the above quoted passage is, needless to say, blatant. Thus, Paul and the early believers continued to engage in the priestly law. Equally manifest, however, is the fact that the manner of observance here advocated is indeed different from the Aaronic manner. The pascal lamb here is not an animal of the flock, but it is rather Christ himself. The difference is clear, as it is in all the other examples we have looked at.

All this considered, one can understand how other first century texts, preserved outside of most Christian New Testament canons, also agree with the ideas we have already seen; namely, that the priestly law was understood by the Nazarenes as still applicable, but that there had been a change in the priesthood and necessarily therefore a change also in the priestly law. One text which is important for us to consider is a letter written from “the church of God temporarily residing in Rome to the church of God temporarily residing in Corinth” (1 Clem. 1:1).³³ This letter was written during the latter part of the first century CE and is commonly attributed to Clement of Rome, one of Paul’s co-laborers in the gospel (Phil. 4:3), since he was the overseer of the church at Rome at about the same time. Regardless of the exact history and origins of this text, it is very significant for our present study due to its early date and therefore its closeness to the apostles and their teachings. This text pre-dates the development of Christianity in the 2nd, 3rd, and 4th centuries and so provides for us a window into the early theology and practices of the churches abroad. Let us now examine the most relevant portion:

40:1 Since all these things are clear to us, and we have looked into the depths of divine knowledge, we ought to do all things *which the Lord has commanded us to perform in an orderly way and at appointed times.* 40:2 He has commanded the *sacrificial offerings* and *liturgical rites* to be carried out, and not carelessly or disorderly, but *according to set times and hours.* 40:3 He Himself has fixed, according to His surpassing counsel, where and by whom He desires them to be performed, in order that all things may be done in holy fashion according to His good pleasure and acceptable to His will. 40:4 Those who *make their offerings at the appointed times*, therefore, are acceptable and blessed, for they err not, *following the ordinances of the Lord.* 40:5 For the high priest has been allotted his proper ministrations, and to the priests their proper place has been assigned, and on the Levites their own duties are laid. The lay man is bound by the lay ordinances. – 1 Clement 40:1-5

Unmistakably, the first century churches were observing priestly activity as part of their regular, everyday lives. The following chapters in this letter build upon the understanding that the priestly activities of the churches are patterned after the activities of the Levitical priest-hood, with one being the shadow of the other.

Another work, known as *The Didache* (meaning, *The Teaching*),³⁴ which is possibly even earlier,³⁵ also contains some relevant data for our study. The work is thought to be an early “church manual” or “fundamental beliefs and practices” of the early “Jewish-Christian” Jesus sect, intended to instruct new believers.³⁶ It was well known in the early centuries and is indisputably an incredibly important text to consider when investigating the early Nazarene community and their teachings.

13:1 Every true prophet who desires to settle among you is worthy of his food. 13:2 Likewise, a true teacher is worthy, as a workman, of his food. 13:3 Accordingly, *take all the first-fruits* of the winepress and of the harvest, of the cattle and of the sheep, and *give them to the prophets, for they are your high priests.* 13:4 But, if you have not a prophet, give it to the poor. 13:5 If you make bread, take the *first share* and give according to the commandment. 13:6 Likewise, when you open a jar of wine or oil, take and give the *first share* to the prophets. 13:7 Also of silver and of clothes and every other possession, take the *first share* as it seems best to you and give *according to the commandment.*

14:1 And on the Lord's Day, after you have come together, *break bread and give thanks*, having first confessed your offenses, *so that your sacrifice may be pure*. 14:2 But let no one who has a quarrel with his neighbor join you until he is reconciled, *lest your sacrifice be defiled*. 14:3 For it was said by the Lord: "In every place and time let there be offered to me a clean sacrifice, because I am the great king;" and also: "and my name is wonderful among the Gentiles" [Mal. 1:11, 14]. – Didache 13-14

The priesthood, sacrifice, and the giving of first-fruits are all mentioned here as part of the assumed duties of the early believers; thus again evidencing that the Christ-followers were not promoting lawlessness in general, or an end to the priestly law in particular. Rather, they believed that all these things continued on under another priesthood. Quite clearly, the Lord's supper is viewed as a sacrifice and prophets are viewed as priests.

More than simply telling us of the priestly practices of the early believers, this passage also gives us important information concerning how they interpreted Scripture. In speaking of the sacrifice of the Lord's supper, *The Didache* quotes Malachi, which, in its own context, was clearly speaking in terms of animal sacrifice (Mal. 1:6-14). This, however, did not stop the writer(s) of *The Didache* from understanding the fulfillment of the passage to be met with another type of sacrifice. While the prophet spoke in the language of the typical service, the passage ultimately meets fulfillment during the time of the antitypical service. Thus, a reference to the sacrifice of an animal was understood as being fulfilled in (and by) the equivalent act within the antitypical service – the thing to which the type pointed. This is only natural too, especially considering the symbolic nature of the typical service itself. Just as the symbolic imagery of apocalyptic prophecies, such as those found in *Daniel*, must ultimately be understood in terms of the realities to which those symbols point, just so the ritual types of the Levitical law must ultimately be understood in terms of the realities to which they point.

The last text we shall consider is a very early³⁷ and very important³⁸ collection of "Jewish-Christian" hymns known as *The Odes of Solomon*. Like *The Didache*, the *Odes* give us a unique glimpse into the beliefs and practice of the early believers in Jesus. While *The Didache* tells us of the priestly ritual behavior of the community and their interpretations of Scripture, the *Odes* show us what they sang. Listening to the songs people sing and the music they produce within their own community brings one, in a special sense, into intimate connection with the community itself and the thoughts (and beliefs) they had coursing through their heads.

Thus in hearing the early Ode

we catch a glimpse of what once abode

in the hearts of those who followed our Lord –

his teachings expressed with cadence and chord.

20:1 *I am a priest of the Lord, and to him I serve as a priest.*

20:2 *And to him I offer the sacrifice of his thought.*

20:3 *For his thought is not like the world, nor like the flesh, nor like them who serve according to the flesh.*

20:4 *The sacrifice of the Lord is righteousness, and purity of heart and lips.*

20:5 *Sacrifice your kidneys³⁹ without blemish; and do not let your bowels oppress another's bowels; and do not let your soul oppress another soul.*

20:6 You should not purchase a foreigner because he is like yourself, nor seek to deceive your neighbor, nor deprive him of the covering for his nakedness.

20:7 But put on the grace of the Lord without envy, and come into his Paradise, and make for yourself a crown from his tree.

20:8 Then put it on your head and be refreshed, and recline upon his serenity.

20:9 For his glory will go before you; and you will receive of his kindness and of his grace; and you will be *anointed* in truth and in the praise of his *holiness*.

20:10 Praise and honor to his name.

HalleluYah. – Ode 20

So, what have been our findings in this study? In reviewing important samples from among the writings of the early followers of Jesus, we have seen that, spread throughout all their various types of literature (including theological treatises, apocalyptic texts, apostolic letters, historical records, letters between congregations, instructional manuals, and hymns), is the crucial and revolutionary idea that the priesthood had been changed and therefore the priestly law had necessarily been changed as well. Nowhere in the Nazarene writings can there be found a repudiation of the priestly law, but it can be seen throughout all their writings that they believed that they were no longer under the Levitical priestly system; instead, they were now to operate within the priestly system which is “after the order of Melchizedek.”

Yes, there is much more to the religion of Jesus than many suppose. Some take him to be a moral teacher. Yes – he was that, but his goal was not simply to turn his followers into “better people.” Some say he was a prophet. Yes, he was a prophet, but his prophetic message was only a means to an end – not an end in itself. Others say he was a political revolutionary, a philosopher, a rabbi, or even the Son of God. Yes, we grant that he is all these things, but he was much more. He is a savior, a life saver, a leader, a friend, and a minister of righteousness. Jesus’ followers did not make up the idea that he was the high priest of a new priesthood. The variety of witnesses to this grand theme testify to its origin with Christ.

So, why is all this important? Here is why: Billions claim to follow Jesus, and yet know nothing of his religion. He established a priestly system which has as its purpose the destruction of sin and the ascendancy of righteousness. This has required, and still requires, self-sacrifice on his part, and it demands the same of everyone who thinks to take on his name. Accepting the name “Christian,” praying, and reading your Bible is not good enough. Just so long as you continue in sin, just that long do you reject the whole message and mission of Christ. The religion of Christ is no half-hearted religion. If you want to benefit from the priesthood of Christ, then take the yoke upon yourself to actively learn of him. Let the antitypical priestly system be as much a part of your daily life as the typical priestly system was a part of lives of the ancient Israelites – and even more so.

6:1 Therefore, we must progress beyond the elementary instructions about Christ and move on to maturity, ...
13:15 Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, acknowledging his name. 13:16 And do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for God is pleased with such sacrifices.... 13:20 Now may the God of peace who by the blood of the everlasting covenant brought back from the dead the great shepherd of the sheep, our Lord Jesus Christ, 13:21 equip you with every good thing to do his will, working in us what is pleasing before him through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever. Amen. – Hebrews 6:1; 13:15-16, 20-21

1See *The Silver Trumpet*, Vol. 1, No. 2, p. 5.

2“Messiah” is a Jewish concept which essentially means “anointed one.” Anciently, the term was used to refer to prophets, priests, and kings, since they were all anointed when being appointed in their respective roles; but by the time of Jesus it had come to refer to a particular individual who would arise and overthrow the foreign oppressors of the Jews and establish a reign of peace.

3See Hebrews 5:1.

4One may wonder why the author of *Hebrews* waited until chapter 5 to even start justifying the claim that Jesus is our high priest which he first mentioned in chapter 2, especially considering the highly controversial nature of such a claim. But, it must be remembered, as mentioned earlier, that *The Epistle to the Hebrews* was not written to unbelieving Jews in an effort to bring them to faith in the Messiah. Rather, it was written to some who had already accepted the Nazarene faith, but who had become sluggish and needed urging to press onward. (See Heb. 5:11-6:20; 13).

5This is demonstrated by his sayings recorded in Matt. 5:18, 23:1-3; John 5:46; and 7:19, among others.

6See *The Two Messiahs and Jesus' Christ* – Sept. 14, 2013; *Psalm 2* – Sept. 20, 2013; and *Psalm 2 Cont. The War Against Yahweh and His Anointed* – Sept. 21, 2013.

7While the idea of multiple Yahwehs is new to most today, it was a well known teaching in antiquity and was used by the early followers of Christ to prove the deity of the Messiah and the plurality in the Godhead. See *Two Powers in Heaven* by Alan F. Segal.

8It is worth noting that Psalm 110 is the most quoted “Old Testament” passage in the “New Testament.”

9This verse is one of the most textually corrupt verses in the whole Hebrew Bible. In other words, it has been altered by many different hands and thus has a whole plethora of different readings in the manuscript record. It is generally agreed, however, that something along the lines of how it has been translated here is close to the original reading, though there may be better possible translations.

10While the Masoretic Text reads, “adonai” here, the Massorah (the Masoretic textual notes) lists this as one of the 134 instances where the text originally read “Yahweh.” See Ginsburg’s edition of the Massorah Vol. 1, pp. 24-26, §§ 107-115.

11Evidently, the author of *Hebrews* based his understanding of Melchizedek off of something else in addition to *Genesis*, for *Genesis* does not indicate that Melchizedek is “affirmed to be alive” or that he is a sort of being which is to be juxtaposed with “mortal men.” There are, however, other texts which paint this sort of picture of Melchizedek, such as 11Q13 (*Melchizedek*) among the Dead Sea Scrolls.

12The word here, ????? (*tupos*), means “type,” “pattern,” or “model.”

13It must be remembered that the English word “heaven” originally meant “the sky.” It is from Old English “heofon” which came from the Proto-Germanic “hibin,” which both also meant “the sky.” Moreover, the Hebrew “shamayim” and the Greek “ouranos” (the words translated “heaven”) also simply mean “the sky” or “the

skies.”

[14](#)The phrase “does away with” could also be just as well translated “abolishes.”

[15](#)The Greek word here for “lapse” is *ekleipo* (???????), which means “lapse,” “fail,” “cease,” “end,” and “depart.”

[16](#)See also Numbers 3:39-51.

[17](#)This is most evident in the record of *Genesis* and the early portions of *Exodus*. We have such examples as found in Gen. 8:20; 12:7, 8; 13:18; 22:9; 26:25; 33:20; 35:1; Ex. 17:15; 18:12.

[18](#)On the exclusive centralization of the sacrificial system in the Levitical order, see also Deut. 12:5-14, 26; 14:23-25; 15:20; 16:2, 5-6, 16, etc.

[19](#)For more on cessation of the Levitical priesthood, see *The Silver Trumpet*, Vol. 1, No. 3. pp. 22-26.

[20](#)The plural is used in both references provided above.

[21](#)For more of the heavenly temple imagery and priestly language throughout *Revelation*, see Rev. 1:6, 12, 13, 20; 2:1; 3:12; 4; 5; 6:9; 7:13-15; 8:1-5; 9:13; 11:1-2, 19; 14:4, 15, 17, 18; 15:5-8; 16:1, 7, 17; 17:1; and 20:6 (list not exhaustive).

[22](#)As we shall see, this radical perspective certainly preceded the destruction of the temple in 70 A.D., as already indicated by Heb. 8:13.

[23](#)This was the name for the Jesus Movement in the 1st Century. See Acts 24:5, 14.

[24](#)See Lev. 18:21; 20:2-5; Deut. 12:31; and 18:10.

[25](#)Otherwise known as “The Lord’s Supper.”

[26](#)See also Didache 6:3.

[27](#)See again all the Scriptures quoted above – especially Heb. 13:15-16 for the elements other than breaking bread.

[28](#)For further study on the aspect of the Lord’s supper, please see *The Lord’s Supper, From the Table to the Altar and Back*, parts 1-4 by Doug Mitchell.

[29](#)The third and ninth hours were the times of sacrifice in ancient Israel. See Josephus' *Antiquities* 14.65; *Apostolic Tradition* 41:6; 11Q19 Column 25:7-8 (?); Mark 15:25 Acts 3:1; 10:30.

[30](#)See Lev. 9:24; 1 Ki. 18:38; 1 Chron. 21:26; 2 Chron. 7:1.

[31](#)See Ex. 23:14-17; 34:23; Deut. 16:16; 1 Ki. 8:16; 14:21; 2 Chron. 6:6.

[32](#)See also John 6:1-15 which records Jesus remaining in Galilee during Passover instead of going up to Jerusalem. The events recorded in the rest of John 6 also took place away from Jerusalem, showing that he did not go to Jerusalem for the rest of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. It is only in John 7:10 that he again went up to Jerusalem (to keep the Feast of Tabernacles), but even then, he went secretly.

[33](#)The writing of which we are speaking, *1 Clement*, was included as part of the New Testament in the important fifth century Codex Alexandrinus as well as by Canon 85 of the Apostolic Canons.

[34](#)The long form of the title for this work is *The Teaching of The Twelve Apostles*.

[35](#)As Thomas O'Loughlin pointed out in *Christian Origins*, p. 86, "... today there is a broad consensus that the original form of this document goes back to the middle of the first century ..." Two other recent volumes (among others) which advocate this position are *The Church in Antioch in the First Century C.E.* by M. Slee and *The Gospel of Matthew's Dependence on the Didache* by Alan Garrow.

[36](#)It has been noted by some scholars that *The Didache* is very Jewish and is rather close to *The Community Rule* of the Qumran sect.

[37](#)The scholarly consensus is that "the Odes were probably composed sometime around A.D. 100" (*Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, Vol. 2, p. 727).

[38](#)See *Sacra Scriptura*, pp. 89-136 in which Charlesworth and McDonald detail the evidence for the widespread and prolonged influence of the Odes in Christianity, dating from as early as the 1st century up until the 16th century.

[39](#)See *The Silver Trumpet*, Vol. 1, No. 3, p. 15.